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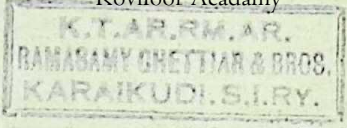

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Swami Vivekananda

HIS LIFE AND TEACHINGS.

GREAT souls that lead us out of 'the encircling gloom' into the promised land are not accidentally born. They come at a time when the world is waiting for them in eager and anxious expectation. It was thus at a critical period of India's history, there was born that great saint, Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa. He lived the life that the *Rishis* had lived in ancient days, and taught once more in deathless words, the golden truths that are enshrined in our scriptures. His beloved disciple, Swami Vivekananda, bore aloft the torch so lit by Sri Ramakrishna to the ends of the earth and shed the light of spiritual knowledge over the whole world.

EARLY LIFE.

He was born on the 9th January, 1862, in one of the oldest Kayastha families, known as the Datta family of Simoolia. His grandfather who, it is said resembled him in appearance became a *Sannyasin* in the

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evening of his life. His father was Vishwanatha Datta, an Attorney-at-Law practising in the Calcutta High Court. His mother who died but recently was a remarkable lady, having had such an excellent faculty of memory that she could reproduce any song after hearing it only once. During childhood he used to be called Vireshwara, because he was born after a long and devoted worship of Siva at Benares. His name was changed to Norendra Nath when he entered school. Even during youth he showed that wonderful memory, that burning love for the lowly and the oppressed, that passion for holiness and spirituality that distinguished his later career. As he grew into manhood, he became a close student of English Philosophy, and while he was at College, he sent to Herbert Spencer a criticism of Spencer's philosophic doctrines. Spencer was very much struck with the performance, and encouraged him in his inquiry after truth. During his collegiate career, the study of Western philosophy led him into agnosticism. Soon after he left College, he came under the influence of Brahmoism. But when he found that the shining lights of Brahmoism had no spiritual experiences, he gave up his connection with that religion. This was a period of acute spiritual suffering for him,

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for he yearned to have a glimpse of the shining countenance of Truth and yearned in vain. He went to the teachers of the various faiths and asked them if they had realised the spiritual truths they taught and invariably got a negative answer. He was eagerly looking for a teacher who would resolve his doubts and lead him on to a full realisation of the truths of the spirit.

DISCIPLESHIP.

He had now passed the B. A. Degree Examination of the Calcutta University, and was preparing himself for becoming a lawyer. At this time, an uncle of his, who was a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, took him to that great saint. Narendra went to the saint in an utterly sceptical frame of mind. Sri Ramakrishna at once recognised him as the man for whom he had waited so long, and who was destined to rouse India from her sleep of ages. The first interview between them is affecting to a degree. Sri Ramakrishna asked him if he could sing religious songs. Narendra said yes, and sang two or three songs in his glorious voice. Sri Ramakrishna was so moved by them that he sat for some time rapt in ecstatic contemplation of God. Norendra at last took leave of him, promising that he would come alone some other

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day. Finally, he became the inseparable disciple of Sri Ramakrishna.

Long afterwards Sri Ramakrishna himself described the first meeting with his illustrious disciple, in these words :—

"Narendra on that first day entered this room by the Western door (facing the Ganges). I saw in him no attention towards the body, no trimming and fashioning of hair of the head or finery of dress and clothing, no attachment towards external objects and interests, like other ordinary men of the world, as if everything about him was devoid of attachment for him. Looking at his eye I thought as if some power had drawn inwards by force a great part of his mind. Seeing him I thought, 'In Calcutta, the abode of people engrossed with worldliness, is it possible for a person of such great Sattvaguna to live!'

"Enquiring about singing, I learnt that he knew only a few Bengali songs and on my asking him to sing them, he began with the song of Brahmasamaj, "O mind, come to your own home," etc., and putting his whole mind and soul into it as if in meditation began to sing it. Hearing the song I could not control my religious emotions and fell into trance.

"Afterwards when he went away, the whole time the mind was filled with such eager longing to see him as cannot be expressed in words. At times the pain was so intense that I felt like some one forcibly wringing a cloth within the heart. Then unable to contain myself, running to an unfrequented part of the Dakshineswar garden near the pine trees, I used to weep aloud giving vent to pent-up feelings saying, "O, you come, I cannot remain without you." Weeping for some time like this would relieve my feelings and I could control myself. For six months it was like this. For some among the other devotees who had come here the mind had felt attracted and distressed like that, but compared to what I felt for Narendranath, it was nothing."

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The first meeting had impressed itself indelibly on the mind of the disciple as well. Narendranath, speaking about the day of the first meeting with Sri Ramakrishna recalled thus :—

"I sang the song, but after it Sri Ramakrishna suddenly getting up from his seat took me by the hand to the veranda, north of his room. It was winter at that time, and to keep out the cold northern wind the open spaces between the pillars of the veranda were closed by curtains, so that entering the veranda and closing the door of the room behind no one could be seen within the room or outside. On Sri Ramakrishna's entering the veranda and closing the door behind I understood he meant to give me some religious instructions in private. But what he said and did was utterly beyond my imagination. Holding my hand his eyes overflowed and he shed copious tears of bliss and addressing me in terms of great endearment, like one long familiar before, said, 'Have you to come after such a length of time! Have you not to consider the great eagerness with which I have been waiting for you and come earlier? Hearing the vain and frivolous talks of the worldly-minded people, my ears are nearly burnt; being unable to speak out the thoughts and feelings of my inmost heart to anybody, my inner religious feelings are all pent up within,'—he spoke many words like this and shed tears. And then just after, standing with folded hands before me and paying me the regards and considerations of a God, he began to say, 'I know, O Lord, you are the ancient Rishi Narayana in the Nara of human form descended again into human body to banish the ignorance and misery of human beings."

Narendra was completely astonished at such actions and behaviour. At first he thought the man was crazy and off his head.

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He kept silent and let the "wonderful mad man" say as he liked. Sitting still he began to observe more closely and scan his ways. He soon found there was nothing of madness in his ways, conversations and dealings with others:—

"Listening to his holy talk and seeing his tranced absorption in God I thought that really he was one who had given up everything for God and what he was saying he had himself followed and practised. 'As I am seeing you and talking with you, so God can be seen and talked with, but who wants this? People, in sorrow for wife and children, can shed tumblerfuls of tears, for money and property they do likewise, but say, who does it in sorrow and contrition of heart, that he has not found and seen the Lord God? If anybody calls on the Lord with great longing of the heart, inwardly saying and feeling, O Lord, I have not found Thee, then the Lord surely shows Himself to him.' Hearing these words from his mouth, the thought arose in my mind that he was not speaking thus from imagination or in the language of rhetoric, like other religious preachers I had heard, but he was repeating what he had directly seen and perceived, giving up everything for the sake of God and calling on Him with his whole mind and heart. Then attempting to reconcile his previous strange behaviour with me with these sane words, the instances of monomaniacs which Abercrombie and other English philosophers have mentioned in their books, arose in my mind and I firmly concluded that he also must be likewise. But even after settling the matter like that, I could not forget the glory and power of his wonderful self-forgetfulness and renunciation for God, and wonderstruck began to think that even if he was off his head, such renunciation for the sake of God was rare, of which few were capable. Even if mad, this man is very holy and pure, of great self-abnegation and therefore fit to command the respect

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and homage of the human heart. Thinking thus, that day, prostrating at his feet I took leave of him and returned to Calcutta."

TRAVELS.

When Sri Ramakrishna passed away on the 16th August, 1886, his disciples resolved to tread in the holy path which he had trod, and give up the worldly life altogether. There were considerable trials before them ; their relations and friends were dissuading them from sacrificing their lives at the altar of truth. But they had already devoted themselves to the cause of India and Hinduism. They exchanged their worldly careers for the beggar's bowl! Their contemplation of the life of their master upbore them and kept them true to their ideal. Some time afterwards Swami Vivekananda wanted to meditate in solitude, and went alone to the Father of mountains. He lived there for six years, and attained that luminous spiritual perception which distinguished him from other men. During that period he went to Tibet and studied Buddhism there. Then he came down from the heights into the world of men and travelled all over India. He went to Khetri, where the Maharajah became his disciple. Then he went along the west coast, as far south as Trivandrum, and from there he went to Madras. Wherever he went he exhorted admiration, and

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succeeded in making young India alive to the glory of her past. At this time the Parliament of Religions was held at Chicago. Some people in the Madras Presidency thought that it would be a very good thing if Swami Vivekananda could be sent over to America to represent Hinduism. He was delighted at the opportunity offered to him of showing his love for his Motherland, and revealing to the West the beauty of the Hindu religion. Funds were subscribed and he went to America *via* Japan.

THE PARLIAMENT OF RELIGIONS.

When he went to Chicago, his little stock of money had run out and he was for a while on the brink of starvation. One day when he was disconsolately walking about the streets of a village near Boston, an old lady who was struck with his appearance and costume, accosted him and asked him his business. Learning from him who he was, she asked him to dinner intending to afford a pleasant surprise to her friends by exhibiting this curious specimen of Eastern humanity. But they found that the specimen exhibited a high order of intelligence and a sweetness of manner that were but rarely met with even in the centres of Western civilisation. They could not understand his philosophic expositions and so invited a professor of

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philosophy to meet him. He met the Swami and recognised his merit. He introduced him to Dr. Barrows, the President of the Parliament of Religions, and the latter put him down as the representative of Hinduism in the Parliament. His opening speech brought him instantaneous fame, and he became at once the central figure of the Parliament. When he read his epoch-making paper on Hinduism, it was received with a storm of applause. *The New York Critique* said :

> He is an orator by divine right and his strong, intelligent face in its picturesque setting of yellow and orange was hardly less interesting than those earnest words and the rich, rhythmical utterance he gave them.

The New York Herald said :

> Vivekananda is undoubtedly the greatest figure in the Parliament of Religions. After hearing him we feel how foolish it is to send missionaries to this learned nation.

The most learned societies in the land vied with one another in honouring him with invitations to lecture. Before the first year of his stay in America was over he had two American disciples, Madam Louis who became Swami Abhayananda and Mr. Sandsberg who became Swami Kripananda. He lectured in various places, and made Vedantism popular in America.

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England.

From America he went over to England and stayed three months there. He held many classes and gave lectures in various places. An English newspaper said :

> All sorts and conditions of men are to be found in London, but the great city contains just now none more remarkable than the philosopher who represented the Hindu Religion at the Parliament of Religions held in Chicago.

He made the acquaintance of Professor Max Muller, and induced him to publish the life and sayings of Sri Ramakrishna. Miss Margaret Noble who is now known as Sister Nivedita, became one of his most devoted disciples. Another disciple was the late J. J. Goowin who accompanied his master wherever be went. A third was the late Captain Sevier who helped in founding the Advaita Ashrama at Mayavati in the Himalayas.

Return to India.

On the 16th December, 1896, Swami Vivekananda, with a handful of English disciples, started for his Motherland. He landed at Colombo, and from there, his journey to Almora was a brilliant triumphal progress. His brethren received him with open arms and gave him a magnificent reception. At every halting place he was surrounded by the leaders of the Hindu community and idolised

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by them. With untiring energy he delivered address after address, evoking enthusiasm for the noble religion of the Vedanta. His health was affected by the continuous strain to which he had been subjected ever since he left India. He retired from the platform for some time, and devoted himself to the consolidation of the work he had set himself to do. He established two monasteries for training Brahmacharins, one about six miles north of Calcutta, and the other in the Himalayas. He organised the Ramakrishna Mission, and settled the lines on which it was to work for the betterment of the people of the land. He also started the Ramakrishna Mission Relief Works at various places, during the famine of 1897. Under such continued exertion his health gave way, and medical experts advised a short residence in England and America. He went to England, and from there to America. After a short stay at California, his health improved, and he again took up platform work. He established a Vedanta Society and an Ashrama called 'Shanti Ashrama' in San Francisco, which are now in a flourishing condition. In New York, he accepted an invitation to attend the Congress of Religions to be held in Paris in 1900. He delivered addresses on Hindu philosophy

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in French. From there he returned to India, with his health utterly shattered. But his fiery nature could not brook the dictates of doctors, and as soon as he saw work to do, he would be restless till it was done. He started the Ramakrishna Shevashrama for helping Sadhus. Another Ashrama was opened at Benares for teaching Brahmacharya to the young men of India. He started also a a Training Home for students, called the 'Ramakrishna Patasala.' He established also the Ramakrishna Home of Service at Benares to relieve the distress of the poor and the helpless. At this time some leading Japanese came to invite him to attend the Religious Congress to be held there, as Japan was in great need of a religious awakening. But his health still continued to be uncertain, and so the visit was put off. On the 4th July, 1902, he became very meditative. He was then in good health. He held a class during the day on Panini's Grammar, and in the afternoon discoursed upon the Vedas. He then went out on a walk, and returned. In the evening he again sat in meditation. At about nine o'clock he went into Mahasamadhi, and passed away from the world of men.

The end was quite sudden and unexpected. But the Swami by all accounts, was conscious

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of its approach. Say his biographers in the exhaustive Life of the Swami :

"On the Day of Mahasamadhi itself, whether consciously or intuitively, his actions were most deliberate and full of meaning. Of all others, the solitary meditation he underwent for three hours in the morning from eight to eleven was the most striking. He had arisen rather early from his bed and had spent the time in much recollection and some quiet conversation. Having partaken of his tea he entered the chapel of the monastery. Suddenly, it was noticed that he had closed all the windows and had bolted all the doors. What transpired there, no one can ever know, save that in his meditation his own Master and the Divine Mother,—to his own realisation One and the same Personality,—were present before him in living spiritual contact. For when he had finished his *Dhyanam*, and when his mind descended from those Exalted Heights of Insight, finding himself in sweet communion with the Infinite, he broke forth in a touching song in which the Highest *Jnanam* mingled with the Highest Bhakti.

Never before had he performed such a meditation in the monastery. And most singular of all was the secrecy of that hour when to be alone and undisturbed in that Final Meditation before his Lord, he had performed such an uncommon act as *bolting* the chapel doors, for he could never meditate in a closed room.

Descending the stairs of the *Thakurghar*, he walked backwards and forwards in the courtyard of the monastery a transfigured presence, his mind most inwardly withdrawn. Suddenly the terseness of his thought expressed itself in a whisper audible enough for the Swami Premananda to overhear, as he chanced to be near by, in the verandah of the chapel. The Swami was saying to himself: "If there were another Vivekananda, he would understand what Vivekananda has done! And yet,—how many Vivekanandas shall be born in time!!" This remark startled

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his *gurubhai*, for never did the Swami speak thus, save when the floodgates of his soul were thrown open and the Living Waters of the Highest Consciousness rushed forth.

In communicating the sad news to America Swami Saradananda sent the following message:

"He entered into the Life Eternal on July 4, Friday evening at ten minutes past nine. It came upon us so suddenly that even the Swamis in the other rooms of the Math had not had the slightest intimation of it. The Swami was meditating in his own room at 7 p.m., leaving word that none was to come to him until called for. An hour after, he called one of us and requested him to fan him on the head. He lay down on his bed quietly and the one tending him thought he was either sleeping or meditating. An hour after, his hands trembled a little and he breathed once very deeply. Then all was quiet for a minute or two. Again he breathed in the same manner, his eyes getting fixed in the centre of his eyebrows and his face assuming a divine expression, and all was over.

"All through the day he felt as free and easy as possible, nay, freer than he had felt for the last six months. He meditated in the morning for three hours together, took his meals with a perfect appetite, gave talks on Sanskrit Grammar, Philosophy and on the Vedas to the Swamis at the Math for more than two hours and discoursed on the Yoga Philosophy. He walked in the afternoon for about two miles, and on returning enquired after every one very tenderly. While resting for a time he conversed on the rise and fall of nations with his companions, and then went into his own room to meditate—you know the rest..."

VIVEKANANDA THE MAN.

It will now be proper to understand what it was that made him wield such extraordinary influence over men, what brought him

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at one bound to the front rank of teachers and kept under a lasting spell the minds of those who had the rare good fortune of meeting him and learning from him the truths that lie hidden in Hindu scriptures. It is always difficult to find out the elements that go to make up what is generally known as personality. But in his case certain traits stood out clear and distinct, and contributed to his influence over his brethren. First and foremost he had those noble characteristics which have always distinguished the greatest religious leaders—love and tenderness towards all things, and a deep over-mastering desire to make the whole world participate in the life of the spirit and its perfect bliss. Not inconsistent with this was his passionate adoration for India, and a burning eagerness to restore her to her ancient supremacy in the realm of religion. Another characteristic was his thorough hatred of shams, his desire to let the daylight of reason stream over all things, and his wish to reject all things that have no justification in reason. He was utterly fearless in his exposure of national defects, and denounced in deathless words superstitious clinging to forms that had long survived their usefulness. He was always sanguine, always confident of the final triumph of truth. His courtesy and affability were also

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marvellous. To these moral traits, he added intellectual gifts of a high order. He had wonderful versatility; he was an orator of the highest type; his style was unique for its union of simplicity and force: he was a master of many languages; he was one of the most learned men of his time; he was a great musician, and also wrote fine poems in his mother tongue; and his conversational powers were of the highest order. When to these characteristics, he added a striking presence, a face lit up by a pair of shining eyes, and a voice that had a richness and musical quality seldom seen among men, we can understand in some measure the wonderful charm of his personality.

SOME ASPECTS OF HIS GENIUS.

Before dealing with his teachings, we should consider certain aspects of his genius. As a thinker, he possessed two great virtues. He evinced great speculative boldness, and followed in the wake of reason without shrinking or fear. Also, he tried to appreciate the conclusions of thought in other countries, and attempted to make a new synthesis in which all truths could find their proper place. His method as a thinker was the method that had always been adopted in India, the method of introspection and self-analysis. What success he achieved as a thinker, we

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shall consider later on. Another aspect of his genius was his poetic gift. His was a poet's soul, to which the world had messages unknown to the ordinary man, and which revealed them in words of imperishable loveliness. He wrote very few poems. But his great poetic gift finds its best expression in the wonderfully imaginative passages that illumine his writings. As a writer he displayed a mastery of a clear, simple, and forcible style, an erudition that was but rarely equalled even by the best Western *savants*. The beauty of his letters is also well-known. Many of his friends will realise what a balm his letters were to their suffering souls. As an orator—and it is as an orator that he will be longest remembered—his chief characteristics were a passionate enthusiasm for noble causes, and energy and felicity of utterance. He never prepared his speeches. The stream of his eloquence came from his heart, and the spontaneity of his speeches enhanced their effect. It was this unique combination of various excellences that gave such currency to his great teachings, and made them powerful agencies in the building up of a new India, which will be the spiritual leader of humanity in the future as she was in the past.

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THE PATRIOT SAINT.

Swami Vivekananda was above all a great patriot. In him "patriotism was deified into the highest saintship." Patriotism with him meant the transfiguration of one's whole personality into the soul of a people. In his famous lecture on "My plan of campaign," he uttered these burning words:

"They talk of patriotism. I believe in patriotism, and I also have my own ideal of patriotism...First feel from the heart...Through the heart comes inspiration. Love opens the most impossible gates; love is the gate to all the secrets of the universe. Feel, therefore, my would-be reformers, my would-be patriots! Do you feel? Do you feel that millions and millions of the descendants of Gods and of sages, have become next-door neighbours to brutes? Do you feel that millions are starving to-day, and millions have been starving for ages? Do you feel that ignorance has come over the land as a dark cloud? Does it make you restless? Does it make you sleepless? Has it gone into your blood, coursing through your veins, becoming consonant with your heart-beats? Has it made you almost mad? Are you seized with that one idea of the misery of ruin, and have you forgotten all about your name, your fame, your dearest ones, your property, even your own bodies? Have you done that? That is the first step to become a patriot, the very first step. I did not go to America, as most of you know, for the Parliament of Religions, but this demon of a feeling was in me and within my soul. I travelled twelve years all over India, finding no way to work for my countrymen, and that is why I went to America. Most of you know that who knew me then. Who cared about this Parliament of Religions? Here was my own flesh and blood sinking every day, and who cared for them? This was my first step."

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In this connection the Swami's passionate exhortation to his countrymen in concluding his book on "Modern India" comes irresistably to our mind:

"Oh India! Forget not—that the ideal of thy womanhood is Sita, Savitri, Damayanti; forget not—that the God thou worshippest is the great ascetic of of ascetics, the all-renouncing Sankara, the Lord of Uma; forget not—that thy marriage, thy wealth, thy life are not for sense-pleasure,—are not for thy individual personal happiness; forget not—that thou art born as a sacrifice to the Mother's altar; forget not—that thy social order is but the reflex of the Infinite Universal Motherhood; forget not—that the lower classes, the ignorant, the poor, the illiterate. the cobler, the sweeper, are thy flesh and blood, thy brothers. Thou brave one, be bold, take courage, be proud that thou art an Indian,—and proudly proclaim.—'I am Indian,—every Indian is my brother.' Say,—'The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahman Indian, the Pariah Indian is my brother.' Thou too clad with but a rag round thy loins proudly proclaim at the top of thy voice,—'The Indian is my brother,—the Indian is my life, India's Gods and Goddesses are my God, India's society is the cradle of my infancy, the pleasure-garden of my youth, the sacred haven, the *varanasi* of my old age.' Say, brother,—'The soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good,' and repeat and pray day and night,—'O Thou Lord of Gouri, O Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me! O thou Mother of Strength, take away my weakness, take away my unmanliness, and—MAKE ME A MAN!'

Message to India.

What were his services to India, and what was the special mission that he was charged

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to deliver to India ? He vindicated her position as the leader of the nations in the realm of thought and religion.—The great message which he delivered to India was that the mission of India was to teach spirituality to the world, that the true sign of life is expansion and we must bring into existence a new aggressive Hinduism, a dynamic-religion, whose votaries will go to the ends of the earth and spiritualise the world, that to effect this object we must get rid of our unmanliness, care for the spirit rather than for the letter, and have once again that passion for the life of the spirit that distinguished the India of the past. In answer to a question by an interviewer about the distinguishing feature of his movement, he said :—

Aggression. Aggression in a religious sense only. Other sects and parties have carried spirituality all over India, but since the days of Buddha we have been the first to break bonds and try to flood the world with missionary zeal.

He next beautifully describes his method :

Our method is very easily described. It simply consists in re-asserting the national life. Buddha preached *renunciation*. India heard, and in six centuries she reached her greatest height. The secret is there. The national ideals of India are *renunciation* and *service*. Intensify her in those channels, and the rest will take care of itself. The banner of the spiritual cannot be raised too high in this country. In it alone is salvation.

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He held that with an increasing realisation of the truth of the doctrine of the *Atman* must come strength and union, and taught the need for the manliness and corporate life with the full conviction that if Indians would only retain their spirituality, and be manly and united, they would be able to take their proper place in the scale of nations.

Message to the West.

The task he set himself was the harmonisation of the East and the West, and the bringing into existence of that higher Aryan type, which will be the result of the interaction of Eastern and Western ideals. To the West, his special message was that materialism can never permanently satisfy the soul of man, that there is a nobler quest than the accumulation of wealth, or the acquisition of an extensive empire, that religion and science are in essential harmony, and that man can best achieve the object of his existence only by living a spiritual life. He taught them to give up the silly notion that man was a sinner, and to think that man was essentially divine. He said in his epoch-making address on Hinduism at the Parliament of Religions: "Ye are the children of God, the shares of immortal bliss, holy and perfect beings, ye divinities on earth, sinners? It is a sin to call a man so; it is a standing libel on human nature."

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He denounced bigotry and taught universal toleration, and made the Western nations realise the harmony of religions. He made them give up the Christian dogma of creation out of nothing and placed before them the Vedantic conception of evolution.

His Teachings.

Every great man has after all to base his claim to the admiration of posterity on the volume of helpful thought that he gives to the world. Before considering Swami Vivekananda's teachings, it will be in place to consider briefly his position as one of the Hindu religious leaders who have handed on in undimmed lustre from generation to generation the lamp of truth lit by the sages of old, and as the disciple of Sri Ramakrishna Paramahamsa in particular. His position as a religious teacher is best stated in his own eloquent words :—

> My teaching is my own interpretation of our ancient books, in the light which my master shed upon them. I claim no supernatural authority. Whatever in my teaching may appeal to the highest intelligence and may be accepted by thinking men, the adoption of that will be my reward. . . Above all, I teach no authority proceeding from hidden beings speaking through visible agents, any more than I claim learning from hidden books or manuscripts. I am the exponent of no occult societies, nor do I believe that good can come of such bodies. Truth stands on its own authority and truth can bear the light of day.

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He says in his lecture on *Cosmos* :—

> We do not pretend to throw new light on these all-absorbing problems ; our proposal is to attempt to put before you the ancient, the hoary truth, in the language of modern times, to speak the thoughts of the ancients in the language of the moderns, to speak the thoughts of the angels in the language of poor humanity, so that men will understand it.

Some of these new statements of old truths are very beautiful and suggestive. He defined the Vedas as "the accumulated treasury of spiritual laws discovered by men in different times." He defined destruction as 'the gross becoming fine,' that instinct is 'involved reason,' and stated that 'every evolution is preceded by an involution.' Special mention should be made of his learned and lucid papers on *Reincarnation* and the *Freedom of the Soul ;* and his books on *Raja Yoga*, *Bhakti Yoga*, *Gnana Yoga* and *Karma Yoga*. The messages that he bore to the world from his master were the fruitful and valuable ideas that religion is realisation, that the religions were so many paths to reach the temple of Truth, and that God should be realised as Mother. These truths he expressed in language which was remarkable for its combination of beauty and power, and won for them the loving approval of the world.

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Contributions to World Thought.

We shall now consider his distinctive contributions to the world of thought. One of the valuable ideas that he gave us is that the origin of religion should be found not in any theory of ghost worship or ancestor-worship, but in ' the struggle to transcend the limitations of the senses,' and that ' man is man so long as he is struggling to rise above nature.'

Again, he pointed out that every religion consists of three parts—the philosophy and ideals of the religion, mythology and ritual, and that though the last two varied in the various religions, there was an essential identity as regards the first.

> The religions of the world are not contradictory or antagonistic: they are but various phases of one eternal religion. One infinite Religion existed all through eternity and will ever exist, and this Religion is expressing itself in various countries, in various ways: therefore, we must respect all religions, and we must try to accept them all as far as we can. . . . To learn this central secret that the truth may be one and yet many at the same time, that we may have different visions of the same truth from different standpoints, is exactly what must be done. Then, instead of antagonism to any one, we shall have infinite sympathy with all.

At the same time he taught that universal religion ought to embrace different types of minds and methods. It ought to find a place

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for the three types of humanity—the worker, the thinker, and the man of devotion. It was on this ground that he maintained that the Vedanta had the best claim to be recognised as the Universal Religion. He says :—

All the other religions of the world are included in the nameless, limitless, eternal Vedic Religion.

Again he says in the *Bhakti Yoga*:—

Every sect of every religion presents only one ideal of its own to mankind, but the eternal Vedantic religion opens to mankind an infinite number of doors for ingress into the inner shrine of Divinity, and places before humanity an almost inexhaustible array of ideals, there being in each of them a manifestation of the eternal one.

Again he taught that the Dualistic, Vishishtad and Adwaitic schools of thought are not in conflict with each other, as they had been long supposed to be. He showed how the monistic conception is the fulfilment of the other conceptions. He says :—

Just as in the case of the six *darsanas* of ours we find they are a gradual unfolding of the grand principles, the music beginning in the soft low notes, and ending in the triumphant blast of the Adwaita, so also in these three systems we find the gradual working up of the human mind towards higher and higher ideals, till everything is merged in the wonderful unity that is reached in the Adwaita system.

Our solution is that the Adwaita is not antagonistic to the dualistic. We say the latter is only one of three steps. Religion always takes three steps. The first is dualism. Then man gets to a higher state,

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partial non-dualism. And at last he finds he is one with the universe. Therefore the three do not contradict, but fulfil.

Again, he proved the hollowness of the theory that the Vedanta has no satisfactory basis of morality. He said :—

The infinite oneness of soul is the eternal sanction of all morality.

This oneness is the rationale of all ethics and all spirituality. He said also :—

Every time that your heart goes out towards the world, you are a true Vedantist, only you do not know it. You are moral without knowing why; and the Vedanta is the philosophy which analysed and taught man to be moral consciously. It is the essence of all religions.

Another teaching of his was that the Vedanta is neither pessimistic nor optimistic. He says in his *Maya and Illusion* :—

Thus the Vedanta philosophy is neither optimistic nor pessimistic. It preaches both of these, and takes things as they are. This world is a mixture of good and evil, happiness and misery; increase the one, and the other must increase with it. There will never be a good world, because the very idea is a contradition in terms; nor can there be a bad world. At the same time it finds out one great secret by this analysis, and it is this, that good and bad are not two cut and dried, separate existences. There is not one thing in this world of ours which you can label as good and good alone, and there is not one thing in this world of ours which you can label as bad and bad alone. The Vedanta says, there must come a time when we will look back and laugh at these ideals of ours which made us afraid of giving up our individuality.

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He also told us that religion is not a mere matter of belief, but is realisation. He says:—

The Vedas teach three things; this self is first to be heard, then to be reasoned, and then to be meditated. When a man first hears it he must reason on it, so that he does not believe it ignorantly, but knowingly; and after reasoning what he is, he must meditate upon it and then realise it; and that is religion. Belief is no part of religion. We say religion is a superconscious state.

Again, he gave a strikingly original explanation of *Maya*. He says:—

But the Maya of the Vedanta, in its last developed form, is neither Idealism nor Realism, neither is it theory. It is a simple statement of facts, what we are and what we see all around us.

He said in his Lecture on the *Vedanta*:—

This theory of Maya has been the most difficult to understand to all ages. Let me tell you that it is surely no theory, it is the combination of the three ideas, *Desa-Kala-Nimitta*, Time, Space and Causation, —and which Time, Space and Causation have been further reduced into *Namarupa*. It is again no theory, but a statement of facts.

He was always unsparing in his analysis of the question, what is the cause of the illusion. He says:—

The question has been asked for the last three thousand years, and the only answer is, when the world is able to formulate a logical question, we will answer it. The question is contradictory. Our position is that the Absolute has become this relative only apparently, that the unconditioned has become the conditioned only in Maya. By the very admission of the unconditioned, we admit that the Absolute

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cannot be acted upon by anything else. It is uncaused, which means that nothing outside itself can act upon it. First of all, if it is unconditioned, it cannot have been acted upon by anything else. In the unconditioned there cannot be time, space or causation. That granted, your question will be: "What caused that which cannot be caused by anything to be changed into this?" Your question is only possible in the conditioned. But you take it out of the conditioned, and want to ask it in the unconditioned. Only when the unconditioned becomes conditioned, and space, time, and causation come in, can the question be asked. We can only say ignorance makes the illusion. The question is impossible. Nothing can have worked in the Absolute. There was no cause. Not that we do not know, or that we are ignorant; but it is above knowledge, and cannot be brought down to the plane of knowledge. We can use the words "I do not know" in two senses. In one way they mean that we are lower than knowledge, and in the other way that the thing is above knowledge. The X-rays have become known now. The very causes of these are disputed, but we are sure that we shall know them. Here we can say we do not know about the X-rays. But about the Absolute we cannot know. In the case of the X-rays we do not know, although it is within the range of knowledge; only we do not know it yet. But, in the other case, it is so much beyond knowledge that it ceases to be a matter of knowing. "By what means can the knower be known?" You are always yourself, and cannot objectify yourself. This was one of the arguments used by our philosophers to prove immortality. If I try to think I am lying dead, what have I to imagine? That I am standing and looking down at myself, at some dead body. So that I cannot objectify myself.

We owe to him another valuable idea, *viz.*, that the ideals and methods of religion can bear daylight and the searching examination

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of reasons and that mystery-mongering ought to be shunned like the plague by every earnest seeker after truth. He says in his introduction to *Raja Yoga*:—

The best guide in life is strength. In religion, as in everything else, discard everything that weakens you, have nothing to do with it. All mystery-mongering weakens the human brain.

He taught also that true spiritual progress cannot be made except with the help of a *guru*. He did not share in the opinion of those who hold that study of sacred books by itself can lead us to the desired goal. In his book on *Bhakti Yoga*, he says:—

The soul can only receive impulses from another soul, and from nothing else. We may study books all our lives, we may become very intellectual; but, in the end, we find that we have not developed at all spiritually. It is not true that a high order of intellectual develepment goes hand in hand with a proportionate development of the spiritual side in man. In studying books we are sometimes deluded into thinking that thereby we are being spiritually helped; but, if we analyse the effect of the study of books on ourselves, we shall find that, at the utmost, it is only our intellect that has derived profit from such studies, but not our inner spirit. This insufficiency of books to quicken spiritual growth is the reason why although almost every one of us can *speak* most wonderfully on spiritual matters, when it comes to action and the living of a truly spiritual life, we find ourselves so awfully deficient. To quicken the spirit, the impulse *must* come from another soul.

He then proceeds to consider the necessary qualifications of the aspirant and the teacher,

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and this portion of the book is full of helpful, and suggestive thought.

Another great truth is that all human emotions are sacred, and that they are put to their right use when they are directed towards God. He says in his *Bhakti Yoga*:

> In *Bhakti Yoga* the central secret is, therefore, to know that the various passions and feelings and emotions in the human heart are not wrong in themselves; only they have to be carefully controlled and given a higher and higher direction until they attain the very highest condition of excellence. The highest direction is that which takes us to God; every other direction is lower.

Again, he made people realise that the momentous struggle of the future was not a struggle for mastery among various religions, but a life-and-death struggle between materialism and spiritualism. He says in his paper on *Reincarnation*:

> The issue has to be fought out between the re-incarnationists who hold that all experiences are stored up as tendencies in the subject of those experiences, the individual soul, and are transmitted by reincarnation of that unbroken individuality, and the materialists who hold that the brain is the subject of all actions and the transmission through cells.

Again, he gave to the world a clear and convincing explanation of Hindu idolatry. He showed that the Hindu worships not the stone but the Supreme being whom the image represents, and that only the perfect men can

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afford to realise God as *Satchitananda*. He says in his lecture on *Bhakti* :—

You are all born idolaters, and idolatry is good because it is in the constitution of human nature. Who can go beyond it? Only the perfect men, the God-men. The rest are all idolaters.

We should now consider the ideas that he spread in regard to the social and material improvement of India. Here we are standing on debatable ground, and an unquestioning assent cannot be accorded to all the views expressed by the Swami. But it must be remembered that his views are generally supported by weighty reasons and always deserve our respectful consideration.

One great idea that he gave to the world was that every one was great in his own place, that every one should do his work and let others do their work. That confusion of duties should be avoided. He says:

Every man should take up his own ideal, and endeavour to accomplish it; that is a surer way of progress than taking up other men's ideas, which he can never hope to accomplish.

To the Social Reformers he pointed out that their ideal should be growth and expansion to fuller life along the lines laid down by the sages, and that their method ought to be conciliation and co-operation. He said:—

Vain it is to attempt the lines of action foreign societies have engrafted upon us. Impossible it is.

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Glory unto God that it is impossible, that we cannot be twisted and tortured into the shape of other nations. I do not condemn the institutions of other races; they are good for them but not for us. What is meat for them may be poison for us. This is the first lesson to learn. With other sciences, other institutions and other traditions behind them, they have got their present systems. We with our traditions, with thousands of years of *Karma* behind us, naturally we can only follow our own bent, run in our own grooves, and that we shall have to do.

He held that the only right principle on which societies should act is to give the utmost liberty of thought and action, so long as it injures no one. He said in one of his letters:—

My idea is to bring to the door of the meanest, the poorest, the noble ideas that the human race has developed both in and out of India, and let them think for themselves. Whether there should be caste or not, whether women should be perfectly free or not does not concern me. Liberty of thought and action is the only condition of life, of growth and well-being. Where it does not exist the many, the race, the nation must go down. Caste or no caste, creed or no creed, any man or class or caste or nation or institution which bars the power of free thought and action of an individual, so long as that power does not injure others, is devilish and must go down.

On the question of caste he made us realise that the absolute destruction of all caste distinctions would be impossible, and that the proper method was not to degrade the Brahmin, but to raise the lower classes by throwing open to them the

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treasure-house of Indian thought. He says :—

From the time of the Upanishads down to the present day, nearly all our great teachers wanted to break through the barriers of caste, *i.e.*, caste in its degenerate state, not the original system. What little good you see in the present caste clings to it from the original caste, which was the most glorious social institution.

On the question of foreign travel, he spoke often and spoke with vehemence. He denounced the foolish notion that foreign travel is unshastraic and injurious to our spiritual welfare. He says :—

We cannot do without the world outside India. The more you go out and travel among the nations of the world, the better for you and country.

Again :—

The sign of life is expansion; we must go out, expand, show life, or degrade, fester, and die; there is no other alternative.

The result of our isolation is to be seen in what the Swami called the "frog-in-the-well" attitude.

"Nowhere in the world have I come across such 'frogs-in-the-well' as we are. Let anything new come from some foreign country, and America will be the first to accept it. But we?—Oh, there are none like us in the world, we men of Aryan blood!"

"And you, what are you?.....talking twaddle all your lives, vain talkers, what are you? Come, see all these people and then go and hide your faces in shame. A race of dotards, you lose your caste if you come out! Sitting down these hundreds of years with an ever-increasing load of crystallised superstition on

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your heads, for hundreds of years spending all your energies upon discussing the touchableness or untouchableness of this food or that, with all humanity crushed out of you by the continuous social tyranny of ages—what are you?...Come, be men! Kick out the priests who are always against progress. Because they would never mend; their hearts would never become big. They are the offspring of centuries of superstition and tyranny. Root out priestcraft first. Come, be men. Come out of your narrow holes and have a look abroad. See how nations are on the march."

"B—and G—may remember, one evening at Pondicherry, we were discussing the question of sea-voyage with a Pundit, and I shall always remember his brutal gestures and his *Kadapi Na* (Never)! They do not know that India is a very small part of the world, and the whole world looks down with contempt upon the three hundred millions of earth worms crawling upon the fair soil of India and trying to oppress each other."

"I wish at least that a million Hindus had travelled all over the world!

As regards the bounds of Hinduism, the Swami was strongly of opinion that we should receive back into our fold those who had gone out of it and were anxious to return, and that we should make provision in our fold for converts to Hinduism.

The Swami held decided views on the question of the improvement of Indian womanhood. He thought the present low position of woman was due to the influence of Buddhism, and that Indian women must be given leave to solve their problems. He said:—

They have many and grave problems, but none that are not to be solved by that magic word 'Education.'

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The true education, however, is not yet conceived of among us. . . . It may be described as a development of faculty, not an accumulation of words, or as a training of individuals to fill rightly and efficiently. So shall we bring to the need of India great, fearless women—women, worthy to continue the traditions of Sangamita, Lila, Ahalya Bai, and Mira Bai, women fit to be the mothers of heroes, because they are pure and selfless and strong with the strength that comes of touching the feet of God.

With regard to education, he taught us that we must strive to take the education of youths into our own hands, and that we must realise the indispensableness of spiritual education. One of the noblest dreams of his life was to have a National University. Also, he said :—

I look upon Religion as the innermost care of education. Mind, I do not mean my own or any one else's opinion about Religion. I think the teacher should take the pupil's starting point in this, as in other respects and enable her to develop along her own line of least resistance.

Upon the question of the elevation of the masses, he felt keenly. He thought that the most pressing of problems was the betterment of the masses, and deplored the fact that our activities were absorbed in other pursuits. He says in one of his epistles :—

Remember that the nation lives in the cottage. But alas ! nobody ever did any thing for them. Our modern reformers are busy about widow re-marriage. Of course I am a sympathiser in every reform, but the fate of a nation does not depend upon the number of husbands their widows get, but *upon the condition of the masses.* Can you raise them ? Can you give them

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back their lost individuality without making them lose their innate spiritual nature? Can you become an occidental of occidentals in your spirit of equality, freedom, work, and energy, and at the same time a Hindu to the very backbone in religious culture and instincts? This is to be done and *we will do it*. You are *all born to do it*. Have faith in yourselves, great convictions are the mothers of great deeds. Onward for ever! Sympathy for the poor, the down-trodden, even unto death, this is our mottoo. . . . , Keep the motto before you, 'elevation of the masses without injuring their religion.'

He was strongly of opinion that our civilisation is doomed unless the material condition of the country can be improved, and the poverty that is acting as a blight upon India is removed at once and for ever. He wrote in one of his epistles :

Their extreme poverty is one of the causes why the Chinese and the Indians have remained in a state of mummified civilisation. To an ordinary Hindu or Chinese every-day necessity is too hideous to allow him to think of anything else.

In one of his powerful letters he says: "And, oh how my heart ached to think of the poor, the low in Indian. They have no chance, no escape, no way to climb up. The poor, the low, the sinners in India have no friends, no help—they cannot rise, try however they may. . . They have forgotten that they too are men. . . . . Onward for ever : sympathy for the poor, the down-trodden, even unto death. That is our motto!" . . . I am poor. I love the poor." He knew at the same time that the

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poor of India have high moral qualities and are the backbone of India. In another letter he says: "The only hope of India is from the masses. The upper classes are physically and morally dead."

He was of opinion that this material betterment ought to go hand in hand with the education of the masses, so that the improvement may be assured and stable. He thought that even the establishment of free schools would not solve the problem, as life was hard for the poor, and young boys would prefer to be at their ploughs with their fathers rather than spend their time in school.

So, as he said, if the poor boy cannot come to education, education must come to him. There are thousands of single-minded, self-sacrificing *Sannyasins* in our own country, going from village, teaching religion. If a part of them can be organised as teachers also of secular things, they will go from place, to place, from door to door, not only preaching but teaching also.

Again:

I see it before my eyes, a nation is advanced in proportion as education and intelligence spread among the masses.

He further emphasised the fact that it is only by a combination of manliness and sympathy that we can achieve our regeneration. In one of his letters he says well:— "In our country we at present need manhood and kindness" (10th October 1897).

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He emphasised the need, nay the imperative necessity of Hindu Muslim Unity. The following from his biography will be read with particular interest:

"In his own personal experience he had seen that the Mahomedans as a race were as generous, as human, and as Indian at heart as the Hindus, and also that the enlightened ones among them understood and appreciated the culture of Hinduism as well, realising the intimate relationship between the philosophy of Sufism and the Advaita Vedanta and other social and religious elements. Therefore, in his own mind, the distinctions between Mahomedan and Hindu, which the Swami as a young man had thought to be insuperable barriers to a unified Indian consciousness, were entirely modified and in many respects obliterated. He thought of all as Indians, and often he seemed to foresee, as a renewed possibility, that which had already been a fact in the history of the Indian Past, namely, that Mahomedan and Hindu, seeing the necessity of confederation and national organisation, would put aside their religious sectarianism and join hands as in the days of Akbar and Shah Jehan."

But perhaps the most important yet the least noticed of his work was his insistent appeal for practical service. He hated the callousness of some of the Saints and Sadhus. He exhorted them to a life of vigorous and active social service:

"Do not talk,—work, work, work!.....There is too much talk, talk, talk!—We are great, we are great! Nonsense! We are imbeciles; that is what we are! To work, my brave men, to work! You have not caught my fire yet—you do not understand me!"

"My child, what I want is muscles of iron and nerves of steel, inside which dwells a mind of the

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same material as that of which the thunderbolt is made. Strength, manhood, Kshattra-Virjya and *Brahma Teja*."

"Work on unto death—I am with you, and when I am gone, my spirit will work with you."

"I look back and scarcely find any action I have done for self—even my wicked deeds were not for self. So I am content."

"Ramanuja, Sankara, seem to have been mere pandits with much narrowness of heart. Where is that love, that weeping heart at the sorrow of others? Dry pedantry of the pandit—and the feeling of only oneself attaining salvation hurry-scurry! But is that possible?.....Can it be attained with any shred of 'I' left in us?

"Sankara had not the slightest bit of Buddha's wonderful heart,—dry intellect merely."

"We want some disciples,—fiery youngmen—do you see!—intelligent and brave, who dare to go to the jaws of death, and are ready to swim the ocean across."

"He alone is a child of Ramakrishna who is moved to pity for all creatures and exerts himself for them even at the risk of incurring personal damnation..... This is the test: he who is Ramakrishna's child, does not seek his personal good. They wish to do good to others even at the point of death."

To the Pandit who came to him to argue on the Vedanta philosophy, he said:

"Panditji, first of all you try to ameliorate the terrible distress that is prevailing everywhere, the heart-rending cry of your hungry countrymen for a morsel of food, and after that come to me to have a debate on Vedanta. To stake one's whole life and soul to save the thousands who are dying of starvation—this is the essence of the religion of Vedanta!"

CONCLUSION.

Such was the life and such were the teachings of the great patriotic sage. It was a

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wise dispensation of Providence that, at a time when all the higher impulses in India were being overborne by materialistic tendencies, there were born two such saints as Sri Ramakrishna Paramhamsa and Swami Vivekananda. They have left a legacy of thought which it is our duty to use in the service of our beloved India. How much we shall be able to do, what measure of success will attend our efforts, we shall leave to God. It is our dury to walk in the path so clearly shown by sages and prophets, to realise in our lives the truths that were taught by them in immortal words.

We may conclude with the following warning and exhortation of the Swami :

"Nothing great can be achieved through trickery. With love, passion for truth, and infinite energy, everything may be achieved. Therefore be manly in your efforts."

"Thou, Hero, take courage, be proud that you are an Indian,—say, in pride, 'I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother'....., say, brother, 'India's soil is my highest heaven, India's good is my good,' and pray day and night, Thou Lord, Thou Mother of the Universe, vouchsafe manliness unto me,—Thou Mother of strength, take away my unmanliness and make me man."

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